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ABSTRACT

The responsiveness of higher education to changing market conditions was assessed in five studies. Two of the studies (information gap studies) were designed to determine the amount of information and interest in higher education held by male and female adults. Another study (community college survey) determined the extent to which community colleges were marketing, and a fourth study (marketing knowledge needed) investigated the depth of the perceived need for better information about marketing community colleges. The fifth study involved in-depth case analyses of several colleges to determine how well they had instituted marketing for adults. The information gap studies found that while 55 percent of the women reported interest in going to college, only 37 percent of the men were interested. Age, level of education, and marital status were found to be the best predictors of interest in going to college. The survey of community colleges in urban, suburban, and rural areas of the United States determined that they were doing well in terms of marketing product development and evaluation of administrative student services. The marketing knowledge study found a lack of information about marketing specifically oriented to community colleges. At the same time, several community colleges were found to have aggressive marketing, at least in terms of promotion and recruitment. The institutional case studies determined that most of the recruitment literature was aimed at the traditional type student. None of the colleges had a written plan or a marketing scheme built into their organizational structure for either traditional or nontraditional students. Recommendations are offered, including to conscientiously address the problem of attrition. (SW)

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MARKETING HIGHER EDUCATION
IN THE EIGHTIES

BY

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Since 1969 and with increasing frequency, higher education institutions have been urged by marketing experts and presidents of educational associations to improve their marketing. (Kotler, 1969; Gleazer, 1974). Since the early seventies, it has been reasonably clear that higher education had more capacity in terms of facilities and faculty than would be needed if colleges and universities continued to depend mainly on the traditional college age student as the primary consumer of its services. The drop in the birth rate in the 1960's will result in 19 percent less 18-year olds in the eighties than there were in the seventies. (Bureau of the Census, 1977.) In the seventies, for example, there was a slight decline in the number of high school students electing to go to the college--from 43 percent in 1974 to 40 percent in 1977. (Weirick, 1978.)

It was suggested by many writers that the decline in the traditional college student cohort could be offset if colleges and universities pursued "non-traditional markets," in particular adults from 25 to 55 years of age. (Gnaulich, 1977; Bishop and Van Dyk, 1977.) A report by the National Commission on Non-Traditional Study (1974) argued that nearly 80 million adults were interested in obtaining more education, but in 1977 there were probably no more than 5 million adults actively engaged in education at traditional higher education institutions. (Bureau of Census, 1978.)

As a result of this apparent discrepancy between projected demand and actual enrollment, it has been suggested repeatedly that higher education institutions needed to become more marketing oriented. There were a proliferation of workshops on marketing higher education. (See almost any issue of the Chronicle of Higher Education.) There is an annual tendency for studies to be published that express concerns about the financial status of higher education. (Cheit, 1972; Lupton, 1976; Andrew and Friedman, 1976; Frances, 1980; Crossland, 1980; Bowen, 1980 to name a few. It should be noted that Frances was optimistic about opportunities for higher education if it became responsive to new markets and if society was ready to make the necessary investment in higher education for adults.)

The literature, in summary, suggests that (1) higher education faces a financial and service crisis, (2) There is an out to this crisis through service to non-traditional students; but (3) that this opportunity would not be realized unless higher education changed its way in terms of service to both adults and traditional students and, in particular, began to market to those students.

Purpose of Study

In the late seventies, the authors of this article began to wonder (1) if the new market that was being forecast by so many was real and (2) if higher education was heeding the advice of almost everyone that it had better begin to market itself, borrowing strategies and techniques from the business world. At the time the authors began to consider the matter, they felt that their wonder might reflect undue pessimism about the adaptability of higher education institutions. The crisis of over-capacity was certainly real. Between 1970 and 1976 approximately 80

institutions had failed; in the late seventies in many states, public as well as private institutions were experiencing enrollment declines; repeated studies of the financial viability of institutions were worrisome if not definitive. There was evidence of deferred maintenance or replacement of facilities and equipment; faculty salaries and benefits have not quite kept up with either inflation or competitive sectors.

The methods or principles of marketing (and its successes) are well established. Essentially, marketing involves four major factors--(1) development and offering of a product or service that is either wanted or for which demand can be created. In education this service is generally defined as curricula, program, courses, and student activities, (2) promoting the product or service--that is, either letting people know where they can obtain the service or product if the need is already felt or by creating a need. The latter is generally necessary if the product is new. For example, the public will generally buy a better mousetrap if one lets them know where to get one if they are being bothered by mice; however, if they don't feel bothered, one must create a demand by pointing out that mice are dirty, disease carrying rodents, (3) pricing the service so that it is competitive not only with other organizations offering the same or similar service but with other services or products, (4) distributing the product or service--that is, offering it at a time and place that is convenient for the consumer.

Higher education institutions like all organizations that survive or grow have from the beginning of time utilized these factors to a certain extent. More often than not, and particularly when travel was difficult, they either built facilities where the population was or they build dormitories for students. They have always offered some service in terms

of curricula and courses. For much of their history, particularly in the United States, they have not had to do too much in the way of promotion to create demand--education has generally been "felt to be a good thing," a way to upward-mobility, a way of enriching not only oneself but society through the production of human capital.

Moreover, higher education has had some experience in pricing its services. Private higher education has offered a wide-range of prices for varying levels of service (quality of education, if you will.) Public education has been in the fortunate position of being able to offer its services at a reasonably low direct price to the consumer. In education, costs and prices are quite different not only among institutions but within themselves. The price of tuition, including room and board, in both private and higher education are generally only an increment of either the costs of the service or of costs to the student. Costs of education are generally paid for through a combination of state and federal funds, endowment income, gifts, and tuition. Costs of education to students include both tuition and room and board minus financial aid and the opportunity costs of lost income while they are in school.

The price of tuition and room and board to the student, whether he selects to pursue higher education in either the private or public sector has progressively declined as a result of increasing financial aid support from federal and state sources, mainly the former, and increased levels of discretionary income. However, higher education has missed one important discipline of marketing. Institutions have generally not had to compete against each other for students. Since the late forties there have generally been more students wanting an education than there have been places for them. Thus, the development of admission standards to screen students, and, in the

sixties, the enormous investment of public and private funding in expanding existing facilities and building new public and private institutions. The most remarkable growth being the development of comprehensive community colleges, designed to offer everyone at least two years of college at a reasonable price in a convenient place. The result has been what was referred to earlier--excess capacity.

Higher education as noted earlier has not been unaware of this excess capacity. Certainly, there was a sufficiency of doomsayers and optimists, the latter arguing that the crisis capacity offered opportunity.

So why the wonder of the authors about whether or not higher education was able or willing to adapt to the crisis by instituting modern marketing strategies?

First, the authors were aware that higher education is essentially conservative--tradition bound if you will in organizational structure and values.

Second, there was the worrisome fact that only 5 million adults out of a projected market of 80 million were being captured--about 6 percent.

Third, a hasty review and a random selection of college catalogs and sales brochures, including flyers on financial aids, did not appear to speak to many adults. More often than not, with the exception of quite specialized brochures, pictures in the catalogs and brochures showed traditional 18 to 24 year old students. Even the literature on changing enrollment patterns, most noticeably in community colleges, seemed to imply some surprise about the increasing percent of older students. Then there was the matter that everyone kept saying colleges and universities were going to have to do their marketing. Yet most of the literature primarily offered advice in promotion, rather regularly ignoring product and organizing the

college for marketing.

The authors decided that this could be satisfied best by launching five different studies to determine the responsiveness of higher education to changing market conditions.

Two of the studies were designed to test the amount of information and interest in higher education that male and female adults had.

Another study was undertaken to determine to what extent Community Colleges (a sector that by mission, location and need should be most responsive to adult students) were marketing.

A fourth study included in its design analysis of how deeply felt was the need for better information about marketing community colleges.

And the fifth study involved in-depth case analyses of several colleges to determine how well they had instituted marketing for adults. While marketing principles appear to be simple, an institution that enters a new market area must generally make considerable investments in new product development, new procedures, and staff development. It was felt that the survey used to determine the extent that Community Colleges were marketing would not give a solid indication of what colleges and universities must eventually go through if they are to compete for new students.

METHODOLOGY

To simplify the description of the different methodologies that were employed to determine if Higher Education Is Truly Worried--or if it is Truly Responding to New Opportunities--the studies will be labeled as follows:

Two studies to determine what information adults had about higher education services will be identified as the Information Gap Studies. These studies employed essentially the same methodology and were conducted in the same city. They differ only in respect to the populations that were studied.

The first obtained information from adult females; the second from adult males.

The third study to determine the extent to which Community Colleges was marketing will be referred to as the Community College Survey.

The fourth study will be identified simply as the Marketing Knowledge Needed.

The fifth study will be referred to as the Institutional Case Studies.
Information Gap Studies

The information gap and institutional case studies were conducted in a small city of about 200,000 people. It was chosen primarily because it had a large community college with branches serving both inner city and suburban areas; a large and reasonably prestigious private university, a large public university located in the inner city, and a small private university.

For the studies, Shepherd and Griffin designed a questionnaire whose primary purpose was to answer the following questions:

Do adults want to enroll in postsecondary institutions of education?

Do they know the tuition and fees of various institutions near their residences? Are they aware of financial aid availability?

Would knowledge about financial aid make a difference in their readiness to attend college? What single or combination of factors would affect their decision to enroll in post-secondary institutions?

To obtain a representative sample of the adult population in the most efficient manner, the city was sampled by area rather than people and this sampling technique was combined with cluster and stratified random sampling. Essentially, the sampling technique was designed to select a representative

group according to race and socio-economic mix. (See Williamson, Karp, and Dalphin, 1977; Anderson, 1975; and Kish 1965 for a more complete description of the underlying rationale and methodology for selecting samples of sub-populations that will provide a representative sample of the population of a city.)

Once the sample has been taken, the investigators questioned the respondents by telephone. The investigators not only completed the questionnaire by recording answers to direct questions, but they also encouraged the respondents to enlarge on their answers.

Discriminate analysis was used to categorize respondents into four groups, using their response to the question, "do you want to go to college?" as the dependent variable. These groups were those who answered yes to the question and were predicted to answer yes; those who were predicted to answer no and answered no; those who were predicted to answer yes, but answered no; and those who were predicted to answer no, but answered yes. Two to three members were selected from each group for intensive in-person interviews.

In addition stepwise regression was used to determine the importance of the variables as predictors of group membership. The intensive interviews were designed to obtain more insights about what variables, other than those set forth in the questionnaire, might be influential in determining a person's interest in pursuing higher education and the amount of information that they had about requirements, price and financial aid.

Institutional Case Studies

Lamb used 13 propositions to guide his case studies of five higher education institutions in the same city studied by Shepherd and Lamb. These were the following:

Proposition 1--Serving non-traditional students is considered by faculty and administration to be a mission of the institution.

Proposition 2--Serving non-traditional students is considered by faculty and administration to be a tradition of the institution.

Proposition 3--The institution is seeking to maintain or increase its enrollment.

Proposition 4--Serving non-traditional students is supported by faculty and administration.

Proposition 5--Discrimination against the non-traditional student is eliminated.

Proposition 6--The institution determines the needs of the non-traditional student.

Proposition 7--The institution admits a wide variety of economic and academic level students.

Proposition 8--The institution responds to the determined needs of the non-traditional student group by providing alternatives, such as evening hours and off-campus locations.

Proposition 9--There is a planned institutional marketing program.

Proposition 10--The institutional plan specifically identifies non-traditional students as a target.

Proposition 11--There are sufficient personnel familiar with marketing principles.

Proposition 12--The marketing program is periodically evaluated.

Proposition 13--There is assistance from internal or external consultants.

In conducting the case studies, Lamb first wrote the admission and financial officers of each institution, requesting copies of catalogs, brochures on programs and financial aids and applications. This literature was reviewed for matters of interest to non-traditional students, for example, off-campus locations of classes, hours of operation, and information concerning financial aid.

After reviewing this material, the investigator then arranged to meet with such officers as the president, vice presidents, deans, admission and financial aid officers, recruiters, faculty, and others that would be involved in or affected by the institution's marketing efforts. The interviews were guided by the above propositions. He also collected and analyzed documents concerning enrollments, schedules, self-studies, faculty handbooks, and policy. Information obtained from interviews and documents were cross-checked with each other to obtain an approximation of the organizational climate in respect to the propositions.

Survey of Community Colleges

Brandis used standard sampling techniques to draw a stratified random sample of 253 public and private community colleges in urban, suburban, and rural areas of the United States. He used a 106-item questionnaire to determine the extent to which colleges do the following:

Develop products or services for special market segments, promote or "sell" their services by public relations and advertising, do market research and evaluate the acceptability of their services and are organized or structured for marketing.

He used standard statistical techniques to determine the means of responses on a five point scale from never to always. He also compared the responses of urban, suburban, rural, public, and private institutions.

Marketing Knowledge Needed

White's study was designed to determine the extent that there was an information gap about how community colleges could market their services as a first step in developing a model marketing program that addressed the values that was compatible with the needs, values, attitudes, organization and governmental constraints of public community colleges.

In doing this study, he reviewed the few handbooks on marketing higher

education, interviewed principal officers of public community colleges, and obtained information from community colleges which he identified as having successful marketing programs. Like the other investigations, his study was guided by the principles and propositions pertaining to marketing. In addition, he examined the values, needs, mission, and policies affecting community colleges as related to marketing. In doing his study, he interviewed approximately 50 officers by phone, letter, or in person and eventually submitted his model to an evaluation panel to determine if it was "realistic and useful."

FINDINGS

Limits of space prevent a full reporting of findings from all five studies. Griffin's and Shepherd's findings generally indicate that the interest of adults in higher education, at least that offered by traditional institutions, may be considerably less than forecast. While 55 percent of the women reported that they were interested in going to college, only 37 percent of the men were interested. Moreover, 70 percent of the men who reported that they were interested in college had incorrect information about requirements and costs; approximately 50 percent of the women who indicated an interest in college had reliable information about requirements and costs.

The major predictors of women's interest in college in order of importance were age (younger persons more often wanted to go to college), previous education, marital status (the single, separated and divorced women were more interested in going to college than married women). Those women who were interested in, but not attending college, gave the following reasons: home responsibilities, job responsibilities and time. Findings from intensive interviews of women supported the results obtained from the

questionnaire and provided additional insights. Women tended to make decisions about going to college or begin to consider such a decision because of some crisis: a marriage on the verge of or in process of breaking up; children growing up and leaving home.

Griffin's study of adult males discovered like Shepherd's that age, level of education and marital status were the best predictors of interest in going to college. However, those men interested in going to college more often than women, 53 percent and 8 percent, respectively, gave cost as the reason for not going. Most of the men included foregone income in their estimate of costs; women did this to a much less extent. Only 4 percent of the men as compared to 26 percent of the women gave time as a reason for not attending college.

Lamb's study of five institutions serving the area surveyed by Griffin and Shepherd provides some insight on the information gap that they discovered. While there were a large number of non-traditional adult students attending all of the colleges (except the small private liberal arts college), none had an identifiable, planned institutional marketing program. Most of the literature aimed at recruiting students was targeted to the traditional type student. As would be expected, faculty and administrators at the public urban university and the community college considered service to non-traditional students as part of their mission. The small liberal arts college and the private university did not. The latter had developed a highly successful, but separate continuing education program for upward mobile adults. Moreover, it had developed a very specific mission for its regular university programs, aimed at traditional students. It had used consultants to perform the necessary market research on potential sources of traditional students. Based on this research, it had successfully expanded its recruiting area,

thereby, decreasing its dependence for students from the local area. None of the colleges had a written plan or a marketing schema built into their organizational structure for either traditional or non-traditional students. Market research and evaluation of the acceptability of programs was sporadic. The private university, which had commissioned market research and followed up on the recommendation of consultants, was experiencing desired enrollment patterns in both their traditional and continuing education programs. The community college and private liberal colleges had suffered enrollment losses just before and during the time this study was done. The public university was maintaining its enrollment, apparently according to plan.

Brandis' survey of community colleges to determine the extent to which they are marketing suggests that they are doing well in terms of (1) product development; private colleges appear to be doing somewhat less than public colleges, (2) evaluation of administrative student services. However, relatively few colleges provided day-care services to students (a somewhat surprising statistic given the public community colleges increasing dependence on non-traditional adult enrollments. Suburban colleges did better than either urban or rural colleges in this area. All of the colleges scored high in the use of all types of promotional materials though direct mail and newspapers were favored slightly. All of the community colleges were attempting to address the distribution problem by offering courses off-campus. However, they did market research only "sometimes" in terms of determining needs and satisfaction. They seldom conducted studies to determine the effect of price on student decisions. As might be expected, private colleges studied the effects of price more than the public sector.

White in his development of a model marketing program or system for public community colleges found a lack of information about marketing,

specifically oriented to community colleges. At the same time, he found several community colleges that were aggressively marketing, at least in terms of promotion and recruitment. While none of these studies specifically examined college's awareness of the attrition problem, it is worth noting that attrition in all segments of higher education is relatively high and is extremely costly. White also found a high level of interest among college administrators in obtaining information in an easy format on marketing.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of Shepherd's and Griffin's studies suggest that there is an information gap in at least one fairly typical small city, served by five colleges. Their findings suggest that the level of interest of non-traditional adults in obtaining higher education from traditional higher education institutions, may be less than what is being forecast. Less than 50 percent of adults indicated an interest in going to college and the majority of those had such a low level of interest that they had not sought out reliable information on requirements and cost. This suggests that higher education at least in one city (the "typicalness" of the city as well as enrollments by adults suggests that the same may be true for the whole of the United States) may have to do much more product or service development for non-traditional adults than it has done to date. The findings from this study also suggest that promotion may have to be oriented increasingly to creating a need for education rather than simply informing adults about the availability of programs.

The findings of Lamb's study suggest that colleges are fully cognizant of the non-traditional market. However, it appears from his findings that colleges in general may not have fully organized themselves (and provided

the necessary staff development) to market in the full sense of the term to either traditional or non-traditional students. In the United States as a whole, some universities and colleges (particularly in the private sector) are probably doing well in marketing--consciously--even if their organization does not reflect a marketing orientation--for example, the private university that Lamb studied. A review of advertisements and other public ways of promoting higher education indicate that there is no major thrust by the higher education industry to "sell" higher education. The industry's efforts seem to be concerned mostly with the pricing question--lobbying in Washington and state capitals for financial aid. This is an admittedly important aspect of marketing. However, there is less emphasis on getting the message to the public that higher education still pays in terms of upward mobility and production of human capital. From Lamb's and Brandis' studies, it can be inferred that the industry and individual institutions are still weak in terms of market research. Lamb's work, as well as a cursory review of college literature, suggests that promotional work still leaves much to be desired in terms of appearance and targeting.

White's, Brandis' and, to a lesser extent, Lamb's studies indicate that college administrators and other staff are becoming increasingly sensitive to the need for improved market.

At the same time, some caveats about what marketing can do are in order. Over-selling in the long-run can seriously damage the credibility of an institution and an industry. Promotion, distribution and price must eventually be supported by product or service. At the moment higher education still has a high value, particularly to those who have attended college at one time or another as shown by Shepherd's and Griffin's study. It is likely that the

adult market has tremendously increased by the "opening of higher education" to all classes and races during the sixties and seventies. However, there is still a large segment of youngsters who try higher education do not finish. It is popular to excuse the attrition on the grounds that the student's were not ready or that their educational goals were achieved. Some of this is certainly true; but attrition is costly in terms of planning, recruiting, scheduling, and lost opportunity. Those who perceive their educational experience as successful, even if they drop out, they may be back; those who perceived it as painful or unrewarding in terms of growth or career preparation probably will not.

Recommendations

The studies and related literature suggest that the marketing of higher education is in its infancy with primary concentration of effort being on promotion, distribution, and, at the industry level, on price. The research suggests that demand, at least in the non-traditional adult sector, may not be as intense as forecasts would indicate. Therefore it is recommended that the industry and the separate institutions:

1. Organize and develop their marketing efforts with the guidance of marketing consultants and in-house managers that will consider all aspects of marketing--costs as well as opportunities--in terms of mission, resources, obtaining the proper mix of product or service, promotion, distribution, and pricing. Those institutions that appear to be doing best as markets decline or shift are those who have a well-thought out mission, a well-defined market, and an organization and staff development plan that relates educational programs, internal and external promotion, distribution, and price.

to specific market segments. (See Andrew and Friedman, 1976).

2. Develop promotional plans that address the problem of increasing or raising the intensity of need for higher education as well as simply informing the public of available services.
3. More conscientiously address the problem of attrition.
4. Invest more in market research to determine needs, and values of potential consumers as a guide for service development and promotion. In the aggregate considerable is being learned about the life styles and needs of adolescents and adults. The studies reported here suggest that this aggregate knowledge is not heavily influencing many schools' promotional and service efforts. For example, most community colleges still do not offer day care service even while they pursue a market that must be constrained by children. Promotion more often than not focus on career development rather than the enjoyment of learning even as sales figures of recreation services suggest that there is a high level of interest in fun. Moreover, the non-traditional post-secondary institutions--museums, for example--are finding increased interest in their offerings.

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